

## **babysitter's guide to the zombie apocalypse by aloneintherain**

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**Summary:**

Steve never gave much thought to what he might do if there was a zombie apocalypse. If he had, he doesn't think he would have chosen to play babysitter to a bunch of middle schoolers.

But now that he is, now that he's responsible for three kids who are too loud, and too reckless, and look at Steve like he can safely lead them through this shit-show, he's surprised by how much he doesn't mind it. It's not terrible. It's almost ... nice.

# 1. Chapter 1

## Author's Note:

This might be a zombie AU, but don't be fooled: it's just a thinly veiled excuse for me write Steve being domestic with these kids. Because that's the kind of writer I am.

Other characters will appear in later chapters.

They think it's a Demogorgon, at first.

Steve is at the Wheelers's home with roses when Dustin spots him across the lawn and ropes him into monster fighting. For reasons Steve can't put into words, he doesn't argue with the middle schooler. He goes to his house, checks out the creepy underground cellar, and finds a gaping hole in the side of the wall.

They deck themselves out in monster hunting gear. Steve thinks he knows what he's getting into. He thinks he's prepared for another batch of craziness, another night like the one last year with Nancy and Jonathan.

It isn't until, instead of Dustin's monster, half a dozen *people* emerge from the shadows, shuffling like their joints are inflexible, groaning loudly, that Steve realises he is, once again, in over his head.

"That's not Dart," Dustin says.

"They're ..." Max says.

"Zombies," Lucas finishes. Dustin punches him in the arm. "What? They are! Look at them."

The people are injured. Too injured to be standing. One man's cheekbone is visible through the deep gash in his cheek. Another woman is bleeding from the temple. Their skin is grey. All of them are littered with bite marks.

"It's time to go," Steve decides, pushing the kids out of the scrap

yard. "Go, go, go!"

He shepherds them away from the slow-moving group. They certainly look undead, but are they really zombies? Is this Steve's life, now?

They sprint down the railroad tracks. The group follows them at a distant, but they aren't fast enough to catch them. They reach Steve's car, and everyone piles in, Dustin in the front seat, Lucas and Max in the back, and Steve speeds out of there.

Dustin shakes his head. "Son of a bitch. Zombies, really? What the shit?"

Steve snaps his fingers at him. "Language."

"Fuck off," Dustin tells him, and Steve rolls his eyes. He lost that particular battle before it even began.

The closer they get to town, the more obvious it is that something is very, very wrong. The streets are deserted. Some cars are pulled over or crashed into poles. They find a hoard of those same shambling, grey-faced things crowded in the middle of the main road, and Steve realises, with a jolt of panic, that might have already spread through Hawkins.

The car squeals to a stop a few feet away from the crowd. As one, the group turns, looks at them, and surges forward like a wave.

"Shit!" Dustin says, throwing himself back against the seat.

Steve reverses with a squeal of tires, and speeds back the way they came.

"What do we do now?" Max asks.

"It's not safe in town," Steve decides. "And we can't fight these things. There's too many of them." The kids fall silent. A few hours ago, they were ready to lure a monster into a scrap yard and take it down like a four-person army. Now, the undead might be ravaging through Hawkins, and a cold ball has settled in each of their stomachs.

“What are we going to do?” Max asks. All three of them are looking at Steve expectantly. He tightens his grip on the steering wheel.

“We’re going to my house,” Steve decides.

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Steve doesn't know where Nancy is.

Lucas contacts Mike on the walkie-talkie. Apparently, he's with Mrs. Byers and Will somewhere. There's something not right with Will. Bewilderingly, Chief Hopper is also there and, according to him, the infected zombies haven't spread through the entire town. It's dangerous—really dangerous—but not hopeless. The local police are gathering everyone in the town hall and barricading it shut.

“My mum,” Dustin says. All the energy seems to seep out of the car at the reminder of their families.

“I’m sure everyone is fine,” Steve says. “You can call them when we get to my house.”

These kids are brave—far braver than Steve was at their age. They're holding it together admirably well. They're pale, but they don't look like they're going to start crying.

Maybe it's the shock. Maybe it's the experience they'd gained last year. Whatever the reason, Steve is grateful. He doesn't know what he'd do with a crying middle schooler. A crying *anyone*, really. Look how well he had dealt with Nancy.

When they get to his house, the kids look around with awe. His parents are out of town. Steve is glad. He feels bad when he realises he's worried less about their safety, and more concerned with being able to apocalypse-proof the house without them fussing.

“Shit,” Dustin says. “You have a pool and everything? This place is so

cool.”

“No one goes into the pool,” Steve says, his hands twitching with the urge to pull the kids away from the sliding door, to keep them away from wandering off and not coming back. Like Barb. “And no one goes outside alone.”

“Are you going to make us use the buddy system?” Max scoffs.

“No, because then two of you brats might wander off together, and that’s not going to fly, either. *I’m* everyone’s buddy, how about that?”

Max rolls her eyes. Lucas groans. Dustin crosses his arms and looks like he’s disappointed in how un-cool Steve is being.

“If something happens to any of you shits, I’m going to get the blame. Go ring your parents and let them know where you are.”

They take it in turns to call their families. Steve can only hear one side of the conversation, but it sounds like Dustin and Lucas’s parents accept it fairly easily. They aren’t happy that their sons are cut off from them, but when they explain about the zombie hoard, they don’t argue. Hawkins hasn’t dealt with something like this before. Not openly. Last year’s shit-show was kept between a few choice people, Steve and the kids included. They talk their families into going to the city centre, where most of the town is gathering to protect themselves.

Steve gazes out the doors to watch for anything trying to sneak up on the house while he listens to one side of the conversation.

“I’m not alone,” Lucas says, receiver shoved under his ear while he sketches something out on printer paper. Steve can’t see what it is from here, but it looks like he’s brainstorming escape plans. “Dustin and Max are with me, and we’re at Steve’s house. He’s looking out for us.” Lucas pauses. “No, Steve Harrington.” He pauses again. “From the high school? He’s a senior.”

Lucas hands the phone out to Steve. “Mom wants to talk to you.”

Steve takes the phone and presses it to his ear. “Hello?”

*“Is this Steve Harrington?”*

*“Speaking.”*

*“How did you find Lucas?”*

“I ran into Dustin at the Wheelers house. I’m dating Nancy Wheeler.” Steve pauses and decides not to backtrack and explain that he was dating Nancy Wheeler, but he doesn’t know where he currently stands with her. He doesn’t think Lucas’s mum cares about his dating life.

Steve quickly explains meeting up with Lucas and Max—heavily editing the part where they all attempted to capture and kill what they thought were monsters from a dark side-dimension—and ended up being chased by zombies.

“We ran into the zombie hoard when we were heading back into town, so I took them to my house. It’s big and on the outskirts of Hawkins. We’ll be safer here than if we tried to get into town.” He pauses, and says, “I won’t let anything happen to these kids.” He pauses again, and tacks on, “M’am.”

*“Harrington,”* Mrs. Sinclair says in a low voice, *“I will come for you if anything happens to my boy.”*

He knows she means it, too. He’s never met this woman, but something in her voice tells him that she’s not messing around. “Yes, ma’am.”

Dustin gets the phone next. Mrs. Henderson wants to talk to Steve, too.

*“Look after my Dustin,”* she says, sounding teary. Steve is uncomfortable.

“Yes, ma’am,” he says.

He must sound trustworthy enough, because she noisily blows her nose, and says, *“You’re a good boy.”*

Steve is even more uncomfortable. The kids must read something in

his expression, because Max snickers and Dustin looks apologetic.

Max can't get through to her parents. She tries three times, but the phone rings out.

She puts the phone back in its cradle, and turns to them with a tight smile. "It's fine."

"You can try again later," Steve offers.

She shakes her head, but says, "Yeah, sure."

The boys look from each other to Steve. He doesn't know what else to say except: "We need to board up the windows."

"What about weapons?" Dustin asks.

"I've got my bat. What other weapons would you use against zombies?"

"Do you have any guns or flame-throwers?"

"No."

"Damnit, Steve."

"Let's just focus on securing the house, first," Steve says. He looks around. There's no convenient stack of plywood for him to cover the windows with.

"We're going to have to dismantle some of this furniture," Lucas says, and Steve sighs because he knows the kid is right.

Steve goes to the back door, snagging his bat and the shed keys as he goes. His dad isn't the type to do much yard work, but they have to have some hardware for tools and makeshift weapons. He doesn't even notice Max has followed him out, until she says, "Why can't we use the pool?"

"What?"

Max gestures at the pool, which Steve has pointedly not been looking

at. He had thought he was being discreet, but apparently not.

“The pool,” she says, as he fumbles to get the shed door unlocked. “What’s wrong with it.”

“Someone I knew, she ... she went missing here. At my house.”

“Missing,” Max says flatly. “Like Will went ‘missing’? Like that El girl?”

Steve doesn’t think he knows an El, but he does know what happened to the littlest Byer. “Kind of,” he says, “but she didn’t come back.”

“Is she dead?”

“Way to be sensitive,” Lucas interrupts, appearing at Max’s side. Dustin follows them out of the house at a light jog, hockey stick in hand, looking around the backyard for zombies.

“What are you shits doing out here?”

“Looking for you,” Lucas says.

“Looking for weapons,” Max says.

“You said you were our buddy,” Dustin says, but he’s grinning, and his eyes keep flicking to the shed door. “We go everywhere you go, right?”

“Thanks for being honest,” Steve tells Max. He finally pries apart the shed’s lock. The door jerks open, and a cloud of dust greets them. He pulls his t-shirt collar over his mouth, and flicks the light on.

“You really weren’t kidding about the lack of flamethrowers,” Dustin says, frowning at the sad looking tools clustered around the shed.

“Sorry,” Steve says.

They sort through the shed. They pull out shovels, more hammers and nails, and, stuffed down the back, a chainsaw that Steve is sure has never been used.



“Hell yeah,” Dustin says, reaching for it. “Jackpot.”

Steve pulls it out of reach, and pushes a shovel into Dustin’s hands instead. “Nice try. Do you even know how to use a chainsaw?”

“No. Do you?”

“... No, but I could probably try and figure it out.” Even if Steve would, he thinks, prefer to stick with his bat.

They haul their load back inside. Steve checks that all the doors and windows are locked, then pulls out the chainsaw. He stares at it for a long minute, trying to find an ‘on’ switch, before he gets out the manual.

“Very manly,” Max says, watching him squint at the manual.

“Gender is a social construction,” Steve says. Max blinks at him. “What? I listen to Nancy. She’s the smartest person I know.”

Max rolls her eyes, and disappears into the kitchen. Lucas goes upstairs to check out the rest of the house. Steve and Dustin push the couch onto its side and slide it against the back door.

“Okay,” Steve says, “stand back.”

“Chainsaw time?” Dustin says.

“Chainsaw time.”

Dustin watches with apparent glee as Steve dons gloves and safety glasses like the manual instructed, and sets about hacking his mom’s dining table, chairs, and a bookshelf into liftable pieces. The chainsaw is unwieldy and, if Steve is being honest with himself, a little frightening, but it makes him feel strong in the same way his bat does.

“That was fucking awesome,” Dustin says. “Can you cut something else up? What about the china cabinet?”

“I’m not destroying my house.”

“Boring.”

Steve turns off the chainsaw and stores it safely away (read: shoves it in the corner), and then sets about boarding the windows and doors with the cut up pieces of furniture. Dustin rounds up the spare nails and wood, handing them to Steve when he asks for them.

About ten minutes later, Max comes out of the kitchen with all the knives the Harringtons have ever owned wrapped in a towel. She lays them out on the ground, and picks up the largest knife.

“More weapons,” she says.

Dustin scrambles to pick out a knife, and Steve says, “I’m not sure how comfortable I am with this.”

The middle schoolers holding knives the size of their forearms blink up at him like he’s stupid. It’s only been a few hours since they discovered that Hawkins has a zombies infestation problem, but Steve already feels overwhelmed.

A distant groan echoes down the street and through the window Steve has just finished boarding up. Okay, maybe the zombies are contributing to how unnerved he feels. Just a little bit.

Steve works on the windows with newfound determination. He’s not going to let anything happen. Not while he’s here.

“If you cut your own fingers off,” Steve tells them as he’s fetching more furniture chunks, “that’s your problem, not mine.”

“Okay, mom,” Max says. She doesn’t look at him, just keeps sorting through the knives in order of least to most effective against a zombie.

Lucas comes downstairs. “There’s a trapdoor in your attic. We could probably barricade ourselves up there, or escape out from the roof.”

“What about if the zombies get on the roof?” Dustin says.

“Could they do that?” Max asks.

Lucas shrugs. "I don't think they're smart enough to climb."

"You can't know that," Dustin says. "We assume they aren't, and then the next thing we know, zombies are chomping on our faces."

"We'd fight them off if they tried," Max says, still holding knives.

Dustin screws up his face. "No way. Are you crazy? We get bitten, and then that's it, we're all *'uhhh must eat brains.'*"

"If we had to evacuate, we could fight our way off the roof," Lucas says. "We would have the height advantage, and if we can find weapons—"

They devolve into a debate about how to escape from the house should they be invaded. Steve gets the impression that they've had this discussion before. Is this normal middle school behaviour?

Once Steve has finished securing the windows and doors, he goes around a second and then third time, checking everything on ground level until he's satisfied.

"Okay," Steve says, coming out into the living room. The kids are seated on the carpet where the couch once was. "I think we're good to go."

"Now what?" Lucas asks.

"We wait."

"You think everything is going to just blow off?" Lucas sounds sceptical, but the kids look hopeful despite themselves, like they want to believe that this entire mess will be sorted out before nightfall.

"I don't know," Steve says. "I *do* know that I'm starving, though. Who wants dinner?"

Lucas insists on taking inventory of the kitchen first. That sounds smart enough, considering they can't go to the shops to pick up more groceries if they run out.

While Lucas and Max sort through the cupboards for non-perishables,

Steve sifts through the fridge for something to make. He wanted to make mac and cheese—it's his signature dish—but Lucas maintains that they use the perishables first, so Steve pulls out vegetables and a packet of beef. He steals two knives from Max's hoard. He assigns Dustin to vegetable chopping detail and hands him one of the knives, but has to intervene when Dustin starts attacking the carrots.

"You have to peel them first," Steve says.

Dustin blinks up at him. "What?"

"Oh, my god. Have you never cooked before?"

"Uh ... no. Mom did all the cooking."

Steve sighs. He turns to fetch the peeler, but Max hands it to him before he's even opened the drawers.

"It's no use in fighting zombies," she says, "so I guess you can have it back."

"How nice of you," Steve says drily.

Steve shows Dustin how to use the peeler. In the kid's defence, he picks it up fairly quickly after that.

Steve browns the beef. In a separate frypan, he cooks up the vegetables. They're cut in laughably uneven pieces, but Steve throws some salt and soy sauce over the top, and decides it's fine.

The sound of sizzling food fills the kitchen. The kids are clustered around the breakfast bar, making notes and watching Steve in equal measure. This is surreal in its own way. With the food thrown together on the stove, the smell of cooking vegetables and meats wafting through the air, it could almost be a normal night. Except instead of Nancy or his parents, there are three strange kids in his kitchen.

Steve never gave much thought to what he might do if there was a zombie apocalypse. If he had, he doesn't think he would have chosen to play babysitter to a bunch of middle schoolers.

But now that he is, now that he's responsible for three kids who are too loud, and too reckless, and look at Steve like he can safely lead them through this shit-show, he's surprised by how much he doesn't mind it. It's not terrible. It's almost ... nice.

## 2. Chapter 2

### Summary for the Chapter:

“You know,” Lucas says, scooping eggs onto his fork, “you’re not that bad, Harrington.”

“At cooking?” Steve asks.

“Your cooking is pretty average,” Lucas says in a tone that suggests ‘pretty average’ is a compliment. “I meant, like, in general.”

Max shrugs and stabs a fork through her bacon. “You’re not my brother. That’s an automatic win in my book.”

### Notes for the Chapter:

I'm adjusting the canon timeline a bit. Instead of Nancy and Jonathan meeting up with everyone the night Steve and the kids went monster hunting, they stayed out of town an extra night. I've edited a few lines from chapter 1 to reflect that.

The kids don't want to sleep downstairs. Steve doesn't tease them when they admit this. When he closes his eyes and imagines going to sleep in his bedroom upstairs, oblivious to zombies breaking in and pouncing on the kids when he's not there to help them, he feels sick.

Steve rolls up his sleeves and shoves his bed and furniture against one wall. Next, he hauls the mattress off the spare bed and into his room, and raids the linen closet for blankets. The kids bring up the couch cushions from the living room. Together, they cover Steve's carpet in the blankets and pillows until it looks more comfortable than his bed.

“Um,” Dustin says. “We don't have any pyjamas.”

“Seriously?” Steve says.

Dustin gestures at Max. “Well, I’m not about to sleep in my undies.”

Max looks torn between offence and disgust.

“Are you, uh, comfortable sleeping in here with three boys?” Steve asks her. He hadn’t even thought about that. Shouldn’t he make sure she has her own space? Putting her in one of the empty rooms, out of his line of sight, would be just as bad as making the kids sleep downstairs.

Max rolls her eyes. “So long as none of you snore or start being weird about it, sure. Do you have pyjamas or what?”

Steve finds them all pyjamas. He normally sleeps in his boxers, so most of his pyjamas are from when he was younger, and aren’t too baggy on the kids. As it turns out, none of his pyjamas fit him, so he has to resort to wearing gym shorts and a t-shirt to bed.

He props his bat on the floor, still in reaching distance, and climbs into bed.

“Anyone hears something,” Steve instructs, “you wake me up.”

They settle into the blankets. The hall-light is still on, but none of them make jokes about needing a nightlight.

It takes all of them a while to get to sleep.

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The next morning, Steve uses all the eggs, bacon, and bread to make breakfast. Lucas stands over the open fridge behind him, chewing on his bottom lip.

“We’re running low,” Lucas says. He checks the cupboard, and then doubles back to the fridge. “Shit. We’re going to run out of food soon.”

“How soon?” Steve asks.

“Soon,” Lucas says.

“We’ve been here less than 24 hours, how can we be running out of food already?” Dustin says. There’s juice all over the counter. Steve sends him a stern glower until Dustin sighs and mops up the juice spill with a dish cloth.

“Didn’t you go over this last night, oh great inventor,” Max says.

“I miscalculated, okay? And I didn’t expect Steve to make so much damn food.”

Steve throws his hands up, spatula still in hand. “You little shits eat a lot. The house isn’t equipped to feed four mouths; it’s equipped to feed me.”

“Even still,” Dustin says, “shouldn’t you have more stuff in your cupboards?”

“I hate going grocery shopping.” They look at him blankly. Steve crosses his arms subconsciously. “You’ll understand when you’re older.”

“And because of that we’re going to starve,” Lucas says.

“We’re not going to starve.” Steve scrubs a hand through his hair. (He had had to lock himself in the bathroom to complete his hair routine in private this morning, but even still, Dustin had caught him trying to discretely tiptoe into his room and smirked knowingly at Steve’s shower-damp hair, curling attractively around his ears, freshly spritzed with Farrah Fawcett spray.)

“You just used the rest of the eggs, Steve,” Lucas says. “Therefore, we’re going to die.”

“Steve, how could you?” Dustin says.

“Our deaths will be on your hands,” Max says.

Steve gestures at them the three kids. “This isn’t normal twelve year



old behaviour.”

“We’re thirteen,” they say together.

“Whatever. Stop nagging me or no one is getting breakfast.” Steve shimmies the spatula under the egg melting on the bottom of frypan, and flips it over. Yolk spills and hardens into a tacky paste. “And I’m not going to let anyone here starve.”

“I wasn’t fucking around,” Lucas says. “We really are going to run out of food. It might take a couple of days, but between the four of us—”

Steve points his spatula at him. Waxy yolk drips onto the tiles. “What the fuck did I just say? I’m not going to let you starve. When we run low, I’ll just go get more. Loot a grocery store or whatever.”

The kids startle. Dustin slams his glass of juice onto the counter. “It’s too dangerous—”

“Hey, let me worry about that. Now, who’s hungry?”

Steve switches off the stove and divvies up the food between the four of them. Max pokes at her rubbery eggs and looks at Steve, eyebrows raised, a disparaging comment on the tip of her tongue. He stares her down, unblinking, until she gives up and starts shovelling food into her mouth.

“You know,” Lucas says, scooping eggs onto his fork, “you’re not that bad, Harrington.”

“At cooking?” Steve asks.

“Your cooking is pretty average,” Lucas says in a tone that suggests ‘pretty average’ is a compliment. “I meant, like, in general.”

Max shrugs and stabs a fork through her bacon. “You’re not my brother. That’s an automatic win in my book.”

“Yeah, you’re brother is ... ” Steve trails off, unsure how he wants to finish that thought. Max nods in understanding.

“He’s better than ‘not bad,’” Dustin says defensively. “He’s great.”

Steve blinks at Dustin. The kid blinks back at him, and then grows flustered. “I just—mean—”

Steve reaches over and ruffles his hair. “You’re pretty great yourself, when you’re not getting in my way.”

After breakfast, they realise, again, that the kids don’t have their own clothes to change into. None of them wants to change back into the clothes from yesterday, as sweaty and dirt-stained as they are.

Steve gives the kids open access to his wardrobe, and leaves to dump their clothes in the washing machine. When he comes back out, he almost falls over laughing.

“Fuck off,” Dustin says, arms crossed. The disapproving look would work better if he wasn’t swimming in Steve’s t-shirt.

Lucas crosses his arms over his denim jacket. The sleeves have been rolled up at least half a dozen times. “Shut up, Steve.”

“I hate you,” Max says. His sweatshirt reaches a few inches shy of her knees. The matching green sweats—dotted with pink, yellow, and purple triangles—make her look like an angry rainbow.

“Sorry,” Steve says, trying to look apologetic, “I’m just not to having kindergarteners in my house—”

Max chunks a throw pillow at him, and Dustin shouts, “You son of a bitch!”

Steve ducks out of the room, howling with laughter.

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The kids get over their own shyness almost immediately, and fend off their boredom by rummaging through his wardrobe like it’s their own.

“I’ve never been a big fashion person,” Max says, sitting cross-legged

on Steve's bed, "but this is fun."

"It's hilarious."

Max flips him off. She's wearing his orange overalls—overalls he hadn't realised he still owned—that clash with her hair.

Dustin slides into the room on socked feet, almost tripping over the edge of their blanket nest. Max takes one look at him and chokes. She clutches at her stomach, hiccuping with laughter.

Dustin ignores her. He does jazz-hands in Steve's direction, wiggling his eyebrows. "Huh? Huh?"

"The girls are going to be all over you," Steve says.

Dustin inspects his fluorescent green leg-warmers and short shorts, almost hidden beneath the cocoa cola singlet. "I'm a lady killer."

"Oh, you'd definitely going to kill someone in that outfit. You're a traffic hazard." Max turns to Steve, too much malicious glee in her eyes for him to be entirely comfortable. "Steve. Steve. Why do you own that?"

"The leg-warmers are my mom's. The shorts are mine."

Max looks, if anything, more delighted. "Oh, my god. How short are they on you?"

"That," Steve says, "is none of your business."

"What is Dustin wearing?" Lucas asks from the doorway. He's wearing khakis and a collared pastel shirt—what Nancy calls his "rich boy" clothes. Lucas pulls it off better than Steve had. He looks like a mini adult.

"If you're going to have a fashion show with my clothes," Steve says, "you could at least be polite enough not to look better in them than I did."

"We can't help we're naturally gorgeous," Dustin says, flipping his curls out of his eyes.

“He was talking to me,” Max says.

“He was talking to me,” Lucas argues.

“No way, stalker.”

The kids start bickering. Steve stretches out on the bed, his long legs almost knocking Max onto the floor. She pushes his feet off her lap without even looking at him, still arguing with Lucas.

The phone rings. They fall silent. When Steve gets up and jogs downstairs to answer it, the kids following on his heels.

“Hello?”

“Steve?” It’s Nancy. Steve sags against the wall, phone pressed to his ear. He hadn’t realised how worried he had been until he heard her voice, sweet and clear on the other end of the line.

“Nance,” he says. “Are you okay?”

“We’re fine.” Steve doesn’t think he needs to ask who she means when she says ‘we.’ “We’re out of town. We tried calling our homes, but no one picked up.”

The kids watch him, listening attentively to the one-sided conversation. He tries to shoo them away, but they don’t budge.

“Stay out of town,” Steve says. “Don’t come back to Hawkins at the moment.”

“What? Why? Steve, if something is wrong, I’m not going to just leave everyone there—”

“Zombies,” Steve blurts. “Hawkins is overrun with zombies.”

There is a significant silence on the other end of the line. Then, Nancy says, “I’m sorry?”

Steve explains as best as he can. He knows it sounds crazy, but thankfully, Nancy is accustomed to crazy, and it doesn’t take him long to convince her that their sleepy town is, in fact, crawling with

the undead.

“No one’s picking up at my house. Steve, if there are zombies—my parents—Mike—”

“Everyone was being escorted into town, last I heard. They were going to secure the Town Hall. And Mike is with Mrs. Byers.”

“Why? Where’s Mrs. Byers?”

“They’re looking after Will. Something’s going on with him.”

“What’s wrong with Will?”

“What?” That’s Jonathan’s voice, muffled in the background. “What’s wrong with Will?”

“Is that why no one is answering at the Byers place?” Nancy asks.

“One minute.” Steve presses the phone against his neck, and clicks his fingers at Lucas and Dustin. “Hey, twerps. Can one of you get Mike on the walkie talkie?”

They try. Neither of them can get through. When Steve relays this to Nancy, all the sweetness leaches out of her voice. “We’re coming back.”

“That’s a bad idea,” Steve says. “You’d both be safer if you stayed away.”

“Our families are there. Our little brothers could be in serious danger. We’re not staying out of this, Steve.”

Steve rubs at his temples. He can feel a headache building. “Fuck. Alright. But there’s a hoard of zombies out on one of the main roads and you don’t have any weapons.”

“Do you have weapons?” she asks.

“Yeah, and I’ve also got three shit-heads to look after.”

Said shit-heads scowl up at Steve, and he idly flips them off.

“Three—?” Nancy cuts herself off. She must be really worried if she’s not perusing that. “Nevermind. Could you direct us around the hoard? Let us borrow some weapons, at least?”

Steve looks around the house, insulated against zombies, in an out-of-the-way location. Sure, they’re running out of food and the kids already look restless, not knowing what’s happening to their friends, but that doesn’t mean Steve wants to leave this safe house.

The idea of any of them—Nancy and Jonathan, and especially the three kids who have already worked their way under his skin—in danger is maddening.

“Nancy,” he says.

“Steve,” she says.

“It’s too dangerous.”

“You don’t have to help, but we’re going to Hawkins no matter what you say.”

“Even without weapons?”

“If we have to.”

Steve scrubs a hand through his hair. He definitely has that headache now. “Fine. I’ll just—put kiddie locks on the car or something. How far away are you?”

“About an hour.”

“Meet me in front of the ‘welcome to Hawkins’ sign in an hour, then.”

Steve hangs up. The kids stare at him. Even though Steve couldn’t see her face through the phone, he gets the distinct impression that Nancy wore that exact expression while she was talking to him.

“We’re coming with,” Max says.

“You don’t even know—” Steve starts.

“Steve,” Dustin cuts in, “we’re coming.”

“But—”

“Would you rather leave us here?” Lucas says. “Alone? What if a zombie breaks in while you’re gone?”

Steve scowls at them. “You shit-heads are going to listen to what I say, when I say it. Do you understand me? You can come if you promise not to run face first into a hoard of zombies.”

“Do we look like we’d do that?” Dustin says, offended.

“Yes,” Steve says without hesitation. “Now help me bag up some of the weapons.”

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Max is wearing [this tracksuit](#) and orange overalls from a Joe Keery photoshoot. Would Steve own something like this? Who knows, but it was the 80s.

Next chapter will be up soonish ... I hope!

### 3. Chapter 3

#### Summary for the Chapter:

Jonathan peers into Steve's car. Dustin waves back at him. "Why do you have my brother's friends in your car?"

"Someone has to make sure they don't get eaten, right?" Steve says.

#### Notes for the Chapter:

I need to make one day my Updating Day. Ok, I'm calling it: from now on, there should be a new chapter every Wednesday. Hopefully I can stick to that.

Warnings for this chapter: gore and mentions of minor character death. I'm going to leave a spoiler-y summary for the sensitive material in the end notes if you're worried/want to skip the end of this chapter.

The maroon sign is in the middle of a flat road, sandwiched between empty fields. They would see any zombie within half a mile.

Steve pulls the car behind the faded sign, and drums his fingers on the steering wheel. The kids shoot him concerned looks. Steve ignores them. He doesn't know what has him more riled up: being out in the open again after being holed up in a safe place, or the prospect of seeing Nancy again.

Jonathan's car pulls over on the other side road, and Nancy steps out, making a bee-line for his car. She looks fine. Worried, but fine. Her hair is freshly washed. and on her neck, above the high collar of her sweater, are fresh hickies.

"Everyone stay here," Steve says. The kids start to argue, and Steve clicks his fingers at them. "No buts! Remember what I said? I will put child locks on."



He steps out to meet Nancy. He can't help the way his eyes linger on her neck, and then flick behind her to Jonathan. She falters.

Steve has had his suspicions that they were over—properly, officially over—for a while, but now, with the guilty way she looks at him, he knows. She's not coming back. His chest is painfully tight.

"Steve," she says, "how have you been?"

"I've been better."

Her lips twitch. "Yeah. Me, too. What's it like in town?"

"I can't say for sure. We could be driving into a horror show."

She shakes her head, regaining some of her momentum. "All the more reason for us to go."

Steve pushes his hair out of his eyes. Same old Nancy. "How did I know you were going to say that?"

"Steve," Jonathan says, hovering behind Nancy's shoulder. Jonathan gives him a quick, awkward smile. Steve takes in the way Nancy leans back into Jonathan's space; Jonathan's matching hickies; the way neither of them will meet his eyes. He isn't surprised. He isn't even angry.

Jonathan peers into Steve's car. Dustin waves back at him. "Why do you have my brother's friends in your car?"

"Someone has to make sure they don't get eaten, right?" Steve says.

Nancy looks from the kids, to Steve, and back again. Steve realises, abruptly, how bizarre this must look. The kids are best friends with both Mike and Will—Nancy and Jonathan's little brothers. Not Steve's.

None of that matters to Steve. He crosses his arms over his chest, part defensive, part challenging, like he's going to fight the two teenagers for the right to play babysitter.

But Nancy just cocks her head to one side, and says, "That's so cute."

“What?” Steve says.

“You being all protective over the kids? It’s cute. Adorable, I’d say.”

Hearing his ex call him adorable and smile at him like that, beatific and teasing all at once, while standing in the middle of a dusty road on the fringes of a zombie-infested town, shouldn’t make Steve flustered. He should be upset. He definitely shouldn’t blush.

Steve scrubs a hand over his suddenly warm neck. “Shut up.”

Jonathan laughs, and then smothers a hand over his mouth when Steve turns his glare in his direction. “Sorry,” Jonathan says.

Inside the car, the kids are making noises about getting out and investigating what has Jonathan spluttering, and then everyone will see Dustin’s leg warmers and his short shorts (Steve’s short shorts), and there is only so much embarrassment he can take in one day.

“Weapons are this way,” he says, rounding the car, Nancy and Jonathan following closely behind. He pops the trunk. “Aside from the bat, you can take what you want.”

Nancy pulls out an axe, testing its weight in her palm. “No guns?”

Jonathan rifles through the collection of hardware until he finds a shovel with a metal handle. He turns it over, frowning. “No flame-throwers?”

Steve throws his hands up. “I can never win with you people.”

Along with the axe and shovel, they each take a knife. They don’t question why Steve has a pile of kitchen knives in his trunk. They look good like this—standing side by side with makeshift weapons, testing their holds on knives pilfered from Steve’s kitchen, matching hickies and freshly washed hair. They match. Steve thinks he could never hate them.

“Last chance to turn back,” Steve says.

Nancy points the knife at him. “I’m going to find my brother.”

Steve sighs and closes the trunk. "Fine. Follow behind me; I'll direct us around the hoard."

"Steve," Nancy says before he can climb back inside his car. "Thank you. And ... I'm sorry."

Steve musters up a smile for them both. "It's fine."

"But—"

"Really. It's fine. Lets go. We don't want a zombie to get the jump on us before we're even in Hawkins."

When Steve climbs back into the driver's seat, three pairs of eyes watch him carefully.

"What was that?" Max asks.

"What was what?"

"That ... weirdness."

Steve turns a stern glare on them. The kids don't flinch away. He won't say it aloud, but their concern brings something to life in his chest.

"I'll tell you when you're older," Steve says.

Max thumps his head rest. "Don't patronise me!"

---

Steve takes them along back roads. They see more and more zombies the closer they get to the Byers' house, which doesn't make sense. The Byers live outside of the main town, like Steve. There shouldn't be this many zombies stumbling around, but there they are, dotting the roadside like white crosses along the highway. Several cars have

crashed into chain fences and been abandoned. Steve doesn't look at any of them too closely. He has to focus on the people he can help—namely, the three kids in his car, becoming more and more impatient the closer they get to Will.

By the time they get to the Byers' house, the sky has begun to darken. Steve casts a quick glance around, but doesn't see any zombies lurking in sight.

Steve grabs his bat from the trunk, and follows the kids up the dirt path, watching the horizon for any approaching threats. Jonathan and Nancy pull up behind Steve's car, and follow them to the door.

They're halfway up the porch when the door bangs open and they come face to face with the business end of a shotgun. Chief Hopper blinks down them. "What the hell?"

Jonathan pushes to the front of the group. "Where's Will?"

Hopper scans them before lowering the shotgun and stepping out of the doorway. "Hurry up and get inside."

They bustle into the house. Hopper shuts and locks the door behind him, then shoves a bookcase in front of it. The noise brings Mike in from the other room. He freezes on the other side of the room, and then Steve's kids shout, "Mike!" They run at each other and collide in a tangle of limbs.

The past few days have been tough on them. Steve has seen their fear, even while they were trying to be brave. Mike must have had a hard time, too. Being away from the rest of his friends couldn't have been easy.

When the kids finally pull away from each other, Dustin thumps Mike on the arm. "Dude. Pick up your walkie-talkie next time."

"Sorry," Mike says. "We ran into some ... some trouble. We were ambushed by zombies, and I had to leave it behind." Mike shrugs, uncomfortable and wounded all at once. Steve wonders what he's not saying. Wonders just how close Mike was to not being able to reunite with his friends.

“Is Will okay?” Jonathan asks.

“He’s this way,” Mike says instead of answering.

Mike leads the kids and Jonathan out of the house, towards the shed, leaving Steve with his ex-girlfriend and, of all people, Chief Hopper.

“Chief,” Steve says. “Shouldn’t you be at the city centre with the rest of the town?”

“I could say the same thing to you, Harrington. What are you doing with a bunch of middle schoolers?” Hopper asks.

Steve shrugs, and gives him the same answer he’d given Nancy. “Someone needed to make sure nothing happened to them.”

“And you figured you were the best person for the job?”

Steve may not be good at a lot of things—like essay writing, maintaining worthwhile friendships, and, apparently, being a good boyfriend—but he’s proud of the way he’s looked after the kids the past 24 hours.

They give him a purpose. They keep his panic at bay. Steve has to admit that the kids are growing on him. Like a fungus.

“Yeah,” Steve says. “Yeah, I am.”

Hopper studies him for a moment, looking from his styled hair to the bat dangling in one hand, to the stubborn, almost challenging tilt of his head, and then nods. “Alright,” Hopper says, like it’s that easy. “They’re your problem now. Keep them out of trouble.”

Did Steve just get the approval of Hawkins’s Chief of Police?

Hopper heads to the shed to check on Will, and Steve follows, still a little dazed.

The inside of the shed has been cannibalised. In place of a workbench and tools is now silvery foil, blacked out windows, and in the centre of the floor, tied down, is Will.

Will Byers has always been a small kid, but now, he looks so much younger, like he couldn't possibly be the same age as the kids crowding around him. He's ashen. Bloody veins creep up his neck like roots. He gazes at his friends with a vacant hunger that sends shivers down Steve's spine. The zombies out in the scrap yard had stared at him like that, with that glazed longing. Will looks more coherent, somehow. More intelligent. Like a predator waiting out its prey.

There's something seriously wrong with Will Byers.

Mike fills them in to the best of his ability; though Will wasn't fully-zombified, not like the shambling corpses wandering around Hawkins, he's no longer fully human, either. The sickness is inside him, like a separate entity. Apparently, Will had ingested zombie blood, rather than being bitten by a zombie.

"Did Will bite a zombie?" Max asks.

Mike fiddles with his sleeves. He looks exhausted, even more so than Steve's kids. "I think it made him. Before, he kept repeating it made me, it made me, over and over again."

Steve meets Dustin's eyes, and mouths, Creepy.

No shit, Dustin mouths back.

Joyce Byers is crouched beside Will. She looks the worse off out of everyone, save Will himself. She looks like she's been in the apocalypse for weeks, months even, rather than days.

"What are we going to do?" Steve asks.

Mrs. Byers looks up from Will. She may be sweaty and tear-streaked, but there is fire behind her eyes. "I'm going to save my son."

---

The windows are boarded up, but according to Nancy, the area is crawling with zombies. Apparently, Will had been making a lot of noise, screaming, howling like a wild thing, and the zombies were attracted by the sound. Now that Will has grown silent again, the zombies have given them some breathing room, but they're still out there, waiting restlessly in the gloom.

They need to flush the sickness out of Will's body before it consumes him—or he consumes them. If he recognises that where they are, Will can call the zombies more accurately.

Hive mind zombies, Steve thinks, and feels sick at the concept.

Hopper has somewhere safe—an “undisclosed location” out in the woods where there will be no one, living or dead, for miles—and he and the Byers are going to take Will there.

They leave Mike behind. Mike only agrees to stay with the other kids because he knows he can't do anything for Will now.

“I'll be with him,” Jonathan says to Mike. “We'll keep him safe.”

They pack everything they need and load it into Jonathan's car. Steve finds Nancy in Jonathan's room, shoving spare t-shirts into a duffle bag.

“You should go with him,” he says.

She startles and drops the bag. “Steve—”

“He'll need you.”

She chews at her lip. He can tell she wants to apologise again, but he really doesn't want to hear it. “But Mike ... ”

“Don't worry. I'm been looking after the brats long enough; I'll keep him safe, too.” She picks the duffle bag back up, and stares at it. “Nance. Go.”

She does. The Byers and Nancy load themselves into the car, Will knocked out in the backseat with Mrs. Byers, wrapped up in a blanket. Hopper gets into his cruiser and follows after them. There's

something at this “undisclosed location” that Hopper is looking for, though Steve doesn’t know what.

They watch from the porch as the headlights fade into the copse of trees. And then it’s just Steve and five kids in the Byers’s house.

They pile back inside, more subdued than they had been an hour ago when they were reuniting.

Steve claps his hands together. “Alright, I’m hungry. Mike, is there any food here?”

Mike shrugs, and sits down on the couch. The kids follow him, and they start talking in low voices, something about the city centre and food supplies and their families. Steve goes into the kitchen to shift through the leftover food. There’s not much, but he does find a loaf of bread that’s only somewhat stale and a jar of peanut butter.

He makes a dozen sandwiches and only just resists cutting them up into triangles. He brings them out on a plate, and the kids dive for them. Even Mike, who looks kind of nauseous, picks up a sandwich.

“This sucks,” Mike says after the food is gone.

“No shit,” Dustin says.

“We can’t just sit here.”

“You heard what Mrs. Byers said,” Lucas says. “We can’t help Will.”

“Yeah, but we can’t just sit here, either.” Mike runs a hand through his hair. “If El was here, we could—”

“El isn’t here,” Lucas points out.

“I know that!”

“I don’t like it either, Mike. We miss her, too. But we can’t just—”

“You don’t get it!” Mike stands up, and he’s yelling now. Lucas jumps to his feet so Mike isn’t towering over him. “She was supposed to be here. Every time something like this happens, she’s there with us, but



now everything has gone to shit, and she's not—it's like she left us—"

"She didn't abandon us," Dustin says.

"I know," Mike says, quieter. "Shit. Of course she didn't. I just ... "

"We know." Lucas puts an arm around Mike's shoulders, and Mike sways into him. The poor kid looks exhausted. "We know how much she meant to you."

A thump echoes from the porch, and everyone else is immediately on their feet.

"What was that?" Dustin says.

"You don't think it was everyone coming back, do you?" Max asks. "Maybe they forgot something."

"Get behind me," Steve says. He looks at the front door, and realises with a jolt that they'd forgotten to slide the bookshelf back in front of it. Or even lock it. Fuck.

Steve's bat is still in the kitchen. Double fuck.

"It's a fucking zombie," Dustin says.

"I left the knives in the car," Max says.

"Knives?" Mike asks.

There's another thump, and then the sound of uneven footsteps approaching the door. The kids shrink behind Steve. He braces himself, fists up. He doesn't have his bat, but he knows how to throw a punch.

The door bursts open, and a zombie sways in the threshold. Its mullet hangs in bloody clumps over its shoulders, and there's bite marks down its chest. Its milky eyes settle on Steve.

Steve blinks, more surprised than afraid.

There's a sharp inhale behind him, and then Max asks in a small

voice, “Billy?”

The thing that was once Billy Hargrove steps forward slowly, and then all but runs at Steve. He swings, and knocks the zombie to the floor. It gets back up again. Steve hits it again, and swears, clutching at his hand. One of the zombie’s cheeks cracks, and when it gets back up, its face is sunken where he’d punched it.

It hits back, like the thing is still Billy rather than a hind-brain monster, and Steve stumbles. The kids cry out. The thing hits him again, and then they’re on the ground, scrambling for each other. It still has Billy’s strength, and it climbs on top of Steve, pinning him with its weight. Steve grabs a loose table leg within arms reach and shoves it into its mouth when it goes for his neck. It bites down, gnawing at the wood, saliva dripping down onto Steve’s chest. Both of Steve’s hands are needed to keep the table leg between its teeth, which means can’t defend himself when the thing starts hitting him with all its strength.

Its all Steve can do to keep his arms up, focussing on occupying its mouth, because if it bites him, that it’s, it’s all over, and he might start attacking the kids. Colours pop in his vision with each punch. The kids are shouting, and Billy is still drooling all over the table leg, and Steve can barely breathe through the blood.

Later, he’ll wonder if it was the zombie that decided to punch him into unconsciousness—a limp prey is a prey that won’t fight back—or remnants of Billy’s consciousness, the part of Billy that enjoyed beating on other people. Or, maybe, the part of Billy that remembered how much he hated Steve Harrington, and wanted to defeat King Steve even in the afterlife.

“Max!” Lucas says.

There’s a wet smack, and Billy’s head comes clean off his neck. Gore splatters Steve—his chest and his arms and his face, and he has to close his lips tight to stop any of it from getting into his mouth—and the floor and walls. The kids scream again.

The zombie’s headless body goes limp, flopping on top of Steve. He doesn’t have the energy to shove it off.

“Oh, my god,” Mike says.

“Stay away from us,” Max says to the headless body, but she sounds close to hysterics. Adrenaline is a shaky, wonderful thing.

Steve pushes himself onto his elbows, as far as he can get with the undead-dead corpse lying on him, and slurs at the kids, “You’re too loud.”

“Steve, what the shit?” Dustin says.

“Loud,” Steve says. “You’ll attract more of them.”

Mike’s eyes dart to the door. “He’s right. There are way more out there, and we were screaming—they’ll be coming.”

“Should we barricade the door again?” Lucas asks.

“No. This place won’t last much longer, not if there’s as many zombies out there as I think there are. And once they come, we’re stuck. We wouldn’t be able to fight our way out.”

“Steve’s house,” Dustin says. “That’s still safe.”

“There’s not enough food for six of us,” Lucas says.

Everything is getting woozy. Steve’s whole face is numb. His elbows slide out from under him, and he collapses backward. The room tilts violently around him.

Max peers down at him. She’s still holding his bat. It looks good in her hands, like she was made to wield it, and he feels distantly proud of her.

“I don’t think he’s in any state to drive,” Max says.

“Well, we can’t stay here,” Mike snaps.

“I didn’t say we should stay here! I just said he shouldn’t drive.”

“Then where the fuck are we going to go?” Lucas says.

Their voices grow smaller, like they’re far off. Steve’s head lolls

against the Byers' musty carpet. All Steve can think is, Billy didn't deserve this, before the world spins and slips out of his grasp, and he passes out.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

After Jonathan, Joyce, Nancy, and Hopper leave with Will, a zombified Billy Hargrove breaks into the house and attacks Steve. Max collects Steve's bat, swings, and takes Billy's head off. Steve passes out as the kids start arguing.

And I'm calling it now: there won't be any more canon character's dying in this fic. Sorry about Billy, but I couldn't pass up the opportunity to keep this scene, but transfer it to zombie AU.

Next chapter is up on Wednesday!

## 4. Chapter 4

### Summary for the Chapter:

Steve wakes in a haze of pain. His vision is blurry and his whole body aches.

When the world around him finally sharpens, he realises three things: he's never been this badly hurt before, not even after fighting that hell monster at the Byers's last year; he's in the backseat of a moving vehicle; and said vehicle is moving uncomfortably quickly.

### Notes for the Chapter:

Chapter warning: more mentions of blood, injury, and a little bit of gore.

Steve wakes in a haze of pain. His vision is blurry and his whole body aches.

When the world around him finally sharpens, he realises three things: he's never been this badly hurt before, not even after fighting that hell monster at the Byers's last year; he's in the backseat of a moving vehicle; and said vehicle is moving uncomfortably quickly.

Steve pushes himself up, and lists to one side. He looks to his left. Is that—? “Nancy?”

Mike scowls down at him. On his other side is Dustin, fluttering his hands over Steve's chest, trying to push him back down. “Whoa, whoa, buddy. It's alright.”

“Where am I?” Lucas peeks at him from the passenger seat. A flash of red hair is situated behind the steering wheel. “Is Max—is Max *driving?*”

“I've got this,” Max says.

“No. No, you do *not* got this.” Steve waves a hand at her, but only manages to smack Dustin the face. Steve doesn’t have enough control over his body to apologise. The car speeds around a corner, and they all fall to the right. Dustin grabs his arm to keep him from sliding to the floor “Oh my god. Pull over.”

“I said I’ve got this.”

“You do not got this. Pull over.” They ignore him. “Pull the car over! Where are you taking us?”

“We’re going back to your house,” Dustin says

“Eventually,” Lucas says.

“Eventually,” Dustin says.

Steve squints at them. None of them will meet his eyes, and Max is driving with too much purpose for them to just be going home.

“What is it?” Steve says. “What are you shits up to?”

“We’re going shopping,” Mike says. “Apparently there’s no food or supplies at your place.”

“What? No—no, no, no.” Steve tries to lever himself up, but Max takes another sharp turn and he’s thrown back down again. Lights pop in vision. Steve moans and squeezes his eyes shut.

“It needs to be done,” Mike says.

“It’s too dangerous,” Steve says, eyes still closed. “The shops are probably crawling with zombies.”

“We already took one zombie out,” Lucas says with a proud, slightly terrified look at Max.

“We don’t need food that badly. Tomorrow I’ll go out and—”

“By yourself?” Dustin cuts in. “Like this?”

“Why do you think we’re going in the first place?” Max says. Dustin

and Lucas make shushing noises.

Steve may be half-delirious, but he isn't stupid. "It's my job to look after you, not the other way around—"

"We can't exactly take you to a hospital," Lucas says.

"Hopper said all the hospitals have been evacuated or are barracked shut," Mike says. " And you need medical attention."

His whole body is hot and tight with pain, like his skin is two sizes too small and his bones are two sizes too big. Max's erratic driving makes the world tip. He's in no state to argue with them.

"When this is all over," Steve manages, "I'm going to kick your asses."

Dustin pats his hand condescendingly. "We know, buddy."

---

The local supermarket is a tall brick building. The parking lot is abandoned, but there are odd stains on the asphalt. Either someone dropped their groceries and a jar of tomato sauce shattered, or ...

"Is it blood?" Lucas asks.

"Don't look," Max says.

"I am very much against to this," Steve says from the backseat.

"Noted," Mike says. "Lucas, what do we need?"

"Non-perishables, mostly," Lucas says. "Cans. Crackers. Pasta. Cereal. The kind of juice you don't need to refrigerate."

"Vegetables," Steve says, because he might as well be constructive if they're going to go ahead with this. And he doesn't want them to get

sick because they haven't been eating vegetables, of all things.

"Canned fruit and veg, sure," Lucas says.

"Anything else?" Mike prompts.

"Soap, I guess. Shampoo. Medical stuff. I don't know what they'll have. Grab what looks helpful."

"No guns," Steve says, in case this is the kind of place that sells guns.

Dustin makes a disappointed noise in the back of his throat. "Ugh, fine."

"I think that's it," Lucas says.

They each grab a weapon from the trunk and head towards the store. The electric doors are shattered, glass shards littering the ground, and they carefully step through the frame and into the store proper.

The rest of the store hasn't fared much better. Some of the shelves have been stripped clean, and produce litters the floor. The lights are all off. It's daylight outside, but the back of the store is dark, away from the sun. Lucas pulls out a flashlight, and Steve is glad one of them had foresight.

The kids try to rush ahead, but Steve whistles—or tries to. His split lips make a raspy, wet noise. Steve bangs his bat against the floor instead. That gets their attention.

"Everyone get behind me," he says.

They look at each other. "Maybe you should stay in the car," Mike tries, looking Steve over. He's sure he looks a mess. His skin feels tacky and too tight, and most of his body, from his mashed face to his boots, are splattered with gore.

"If we're doing this, I'm going first," Steve says in a voice that brooks no argument.

Surprisingly, they don't argue again, and fall into step behind him. They snag a couple of baskets by the check out, and Steve leads them



through the aisles, his bat held high in case something unfriendly comes around the corner.

His eyes still blur every few steps, and his legs shake beneath him, his heart beating a fast tempo against his ribs, but the kids are behind him. They're out in the open. It doesn't matter what state Steve is in; he has to get them through this.

They go slowly, quietly. Steve thinks Dustin might be tip-toeing in his sneakers.

The kids sweep cans and food packets into their baskets without looking too closely at the labels. They take miscellaneous stuff, too—packets of underwear, socks, and t-shirts; bathroom cleaner and dish soap; batteries; and Max snags a few board games and puzzle books from a special item shelf.

The medical supplies are at the store's far right. The produce and frozen sections have gone bad, and the stink of rotting meats and dairy are thickest on this side of the store. Some of the kids hike their shirts over their nose. Steve would do the same, but the collar would pull at the bloody tear on his lip.

"I think we only need a few more things," Lucas says.

Dustin hovers close to Steve. His basket is the least full, preoccupied with watching Steve. "Yeah," Dustin says, shooting the others a meaningful look, "we should get out of here as soon as we can."

Steve nods. He wants nothing more than to go home where it's secure, where he knows the kids will be safe, where he can guzzle water and then can curl up in bed to sleep his off injuries.

They round the corner and Steve freezes. There, crouched on the damp floor between the freezer section and the hygiene aisle, is a zombie.

Steve realises the rotting smell isn't bad milk; it's a decomposing corpse.

The zombie, a woman in a store uniform, its hair bloody strings around its gouged face, gurgles up at them. It shifts, legs braced.

“Everyone out,” Steve says.

“No, wait,” Dustin says. “I can see the medical stuff just there.”

“I guess we’re doing this, then,” Steve says.

The zombie lunges and Steve swings. The bat drives into its chest. Steve hears its ribs crack, but the zombie barely pauses. Its hands scramble for Steve, even as he draws the bat back, nails pulling out of its flesh with a wet slurping noise. Its hands claw at his bloody face, and he can feel his wounds splitting open.

“Hurry up,” Steve says through gritted teeth. He swings again, and catches the zombie around the neck. It skids against the vinyl floor. Steve stands over it, bat ready, panting heavily. Everything hurts.

“I’m not a doctor,” Dustin says, voice pitched high in his panic. “What am I looking for?!”

“Medicine,” Mike says.

“What fucking *kind*?”

“Painkillers,” Lucas says. “The cream stuff that stops infections.”

Dustin waves his hand at the packages with tiny print. “*Where?!?*”

The zombie comes at him again. When Steve hits it across the shoulders, the impact reverberates up his spine. His arms are shaking. His legs are shaking. The world is shaking, rocking up beneath him, making his whole body tremble, teeth clacking together. He squares his heaving shoulders and doesn’t move from his position in front of his kids, bat drooping in his hands.

“For god’s sake,” Max says, pushing in front of them. She scans the shelves, and then sweeps a dozen different pill bottles and creams into her basket. “There. Let’s go.”

Max shoves him towards Steve. Dustin looks at Steve, and says, “Ah, shit.”

Dustin grabs Steve around the elbow, and hauls him away from the

growling zombie. The kids make a dash for the door, baskets in hand. Steve wants to argue that he should go first, but he's struggling to keep his feet under him.

They exit the store. The sun is blinding. Steve pulls free of Dustin's grip and lists to the side.

It's a good thing Hawkins is overrun by zombies, Steve thinks blearily as he falls to his knees and throws up all over the pavement. The town could be overrun by those demogorgons. They move too quickly for convenient vomit breaks when you're being chased. Zombies might be more brutal, in that if they get you, it's not just death that awaits—it's reanimation and the possibility of your corpse going after your loved ones—but they are slow. Steve appreciates the slowness.

"Steve!" Dustin crouches down beside him. "Oh, gross. That's very gross. Come on, we have to move."

"It's okay," Steve says, flopping a hand in the air. He almost hits Dustin in the face. "It's slow. We're fine."

"We are absolutely not *fine*," Dustin says. "Get your ass in the car."

"Max isn't going to drive is she?" Steve frowns at Dustin. He hopes it looks sufficiently disproving. "She's eight."

"I'm thirteen, so shut the fuck up," Max says somewhere in the background. Possibly, she's already behind the steering wheel. Steve's vision swims, and he can't make out her red hair.

"You're not good to drive," Dustin says. "Come on, up you get."

"Company!" Lucas shouts.

The zombie shambles out of the supermarket, and Steve realises with a jolt where he is again. He forces himself back to awareness, and stumbles to his feet. Dustin and Lucas are there. Dustin wraps an arm around Steve's hips, and Mike ducks under his other arm, and pulls him away from the supermarket. It makes for an awkward, three-legged run, and they fall into the backseat rather than climb. Dustin and Mike shut the backdoors with loud thuds, Steve between them in the middle seat.

“Drive!” Mike says, right before the zombie slams against the window. The kids scream. The thing is strong; its fist leaves a spiderweb crack in the glass. “*Drive*,” Mike shouts again.

Max peels out of the car park, hitting a cardboard sign and running over the low bushes planted on the curb as she goes. Steve slouches against Dustin, eyes squeezed shut.

“Please don’t throw up,” Dustin says, like a prayer rather than a request. “Please don’t throw up. Please don’t throw up.”

Steve doesn’t remember the drive back to his house. He has vague recollections of Mike patting him awake so they could ask him for directions—directions he’s not sure he actually gives—and of leaning limply against Dustin, and of Mike and Dustin trying to haul him inside the house.

When they’re inside, door locked behind them, they pause in the entryway. Lucas clutches the flashlight to his chest. Max is holding Steve’s bat.

“Are you going to—” Dustin begins, but they hush him.

“Yeah,” Lucas says. He looks scared, but one look at Steve and he puts on a brave face. “Yeah, we’re going to put the groceries in the kitchen, right?”

Something tells Steve they’re not going to put the groceries in the kitchen.

“Don’t,” Steve says.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Max says, and then her and Lucas are gone, wondering deeper into the house, wielding the bat and flashlight between them.

They come back some few minutes later, looking much more relaxed.

“Place is clear,” Max declares.

“Shoulda let me do that,” Steve says. “What if something broke in?”

“You had like ten minutes of clarity in the shopping centre,” Max tells him, “and then you threw up all over the ground. Sorry if I don’t trust your reflexes right now.”

Steve scowls at her. “Fuck off.”

Max flips him off. Mike and Dustin help Steve up the stairs. They barely manage a few steps before he tilts backward, and Max and Lucas have to help prop him up. The five of them make it up the stairs slowly, a weird ten-legged monster with Steve in the centre.

“Wait,” Steve says when they cross the threshold of his bedroom. The blanket nest is still there, crumpled and cold. The kids push him to his bed, and Steve grabs the closest one—Max, he thinks “The doors. Lock the doors. Put furniture in front of it. And my bat—my bat—”

Max pushes him off. “I’ve got it. I’ll look after these shits, okay?”

Steve squints at her, taking too long to process that, but then he nods. “Okay. Okay.”

And then he falls onto his own bed, still wearing all his clothes and shoes, still covered in gore, and passes out for the second time that day.

### **Author's Note:**

I’m not an amazing cook. Neither is Steve Harrington. If their meal sounds a little so-so, that’s because it probably is. He’s doing his best, and he will keep these kids fed, and that’s what matters.

This fic will focus more on the kids than the actual zombie fighting situation. The kids will see some kind of action later on, but I figure the Main Group (eg. the Byers, Nancy, and Hopper) are trying to piece out the situation, while Steve’s main priority is making sure these kids are safe.

Updates will (probably) be weekly.